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Grievance Resolution: Perceived Goal Interdependence and Interaction Patterns

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Résumé de l'article

La résolution de conflits survenant lors de l'administration de la convention collective influence sérieusement les relations entre patrons et syndicats d'une part et la performance économique de l'entreprise d'autre part. L'importance des facteurs organisationnels et environnementaux dans la résolution des griefs est bien établie. Cette étude identifie les comportements et les perceptions de ces individus impliqués et qui influencent la résolution des griefs.

La négociation des griefs est un processus de résolution bipartite de conflit par les représentants syndicaux et patronaux. Les études démontrent que l'occurrence de solutions complètes et efficaces est plus probable lorsque les parties croient que leurs objectifs sont positivement interdépendants. Selon Morton Deutsch, ceux qui croient que leurs objectifs sont positivement interreliés sont capables d'administrer plus efficacement le conflit que ceux qui ont des objectifs concurrents. De plus, des offres complètes, réciproques, et autres tels comportements lors des discussions facilitent la solution efficace des conflits. Nous suggérons ici que des objectifs coopératifs favorisent l'étude directe et plus ouverte de points de vue divergents, la promotion de l'intérêt mutuel, la compréhension des autres et la recherche des meilleures idées dans la résolution productive des griefs.

Les gestionnaires de deux grandes entreprises de produits de la forêt dans l'Ouest canadien et leurs représentants syndicaux aux niveaux local et de district ont accepté de participer à une étude portant sur l'administration des griefs. Avec leur appui, 31 personnes provenant de deux sites différents pour une entreprise et 24 provenant de quatre sites différents pour la seconde se sont portées volontaires pour accorder une entrevue. Quatre directeurs d'usine, 14 contremaîtres de second niveau, 5 surintendants, 7 gestionnaires de relations du travail, 7 présidents d'usine, 4 vice-présidents, 12 délégués syndicaux et deux secrétaires représentant le syndicat ont participé à ce travail. Les répondants eux-mêmes ont fourni 32 griefs qui étaient au stade du comité et 25 cas non résolus et référés au niveau supérieur. Tous ces cas ont été utilisés pour la présente étude.

Nous avons utilisé la méthode de l'incident critique pour établir le programme des entrevues. Nous avons demandé aux répondants de décrire en détail un grief récent significatif. Les répondants décrivaient alors le contexte, les événements, leurs propres objectifs, ceux de l'autre partie et les conséquences. Ils répondaient ensuite à des questions spécifiques permettant la codification.

L'analyse des données démontre que les représentants patronaux et syndicaux partageant des objectifs coopératifs exprimaient leurs divergences de façon ouverte, écoutaient l'autre, faisaient preuve d'une intention de travailler pour le bénéfice mutuel et combinaient leurs idées. En ayant des objectifs positivement interreliés et en interagissant avec un esprit ouvert, ils ont indiqué des solutions créatives de qualité et utilisé leurs ressources efficacement. Cependant, ceux dotés d'objectifs compétitifs ont interagi de façon fermée et furent incapables de s'entendre efficacement sur des solutions complètes. Les résultats des données qualitatives confirment aussi notre cadre théorique général.

Les principales raisons qu'ont amené employés et gestionnaires à percevoir que leurs objectifs étaient interreliés positivement sont : une compréhension partagée du problème et de sa solution, une acceptation des objectifs de l'autre et une orientation gagnant-gagnant avec bénéfice mutuel. Des intérêts et des aspirations divergents, l'intransigeance et la noninformation menaient directement à des objectifs compétitifs. Nos résultats, bien qu'ils soient limités par l'échantillon et la méthodologie utilisée, ont des implications pratiques potentiellement importantes s'ils sont confirmés. Les représentants peuvent, à l'intérieur des contraintes organisationnelles et environnementales, être en mesure de développer un sens profond de relations positives permettant de résoudre leurs griefs et d'aider les employés à mieux s'intégrer à l'entreprise et au syndicat et à croire que leur lieu de travail est juste et productif. Notre étude contribue à la gestion efficace des griefs en démontrant l'utilité d'une théorie psychosociale d'interdépendance d'objectifs dans l'analyse de la gestion des griefs.

Grievance Resolution

Perceived Goal Interdependence and Interaction Patterns

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This study identifies behaviours and perceptions of the individuals involved that affect grievance resolutions. Based on conflict research, the study proposes that cooperative goals promote the direct, open-minded consideration of opposing views which leads to quality solutions efficiently developed. Management and union representatives in two large Western Canadian forest product companies were interviewed about grievances they had handled that were and were not settled within their committee. They first described in detail a recent, significant grievance and then answered specific questions to code the incident. Structural-equation results and the analysis of the qualitative data suggest that cooperative goals induce the open-minded discussion of diverse views, which in turn results in high-quality, integrative solutions. However, with competitive goals, managers and employees interacted close-mindedly and were unable to agree upon integrative solutions efficiently. If replicated, the framework developed can help structure cooperative interdependence and guide skill training in grievance handling.

In North American unionized workplaces, formal grievance procedures are typically used to resolve alleged violations of rights to which employees or employers are entitled by collective agreements or law (Gordon and Miller

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1984; Kochan and Katz 1988). These violations often reflect differences over the interpretation and application of collective bargaining agreements and are resolved through a succession of discussions from lower to higher levels of management and union representatives.

Although academic as well as popular interest in labour-management relations typically focus on contract negotiations and strikes, the day-to-day administration of a collective agreement represents the majority of labour-management relations employees and employers experience in the workplace. How these disputes are resolved strongly affect the relationships between the parties involved (Knight 1986a), the labour relations climate within the workplace (Gantz and Whitehead 1982; Meyer 1994), and the firm's economic performance (Ichniowski 1986; Katz, Kochan, and Gobeille 1983). Resolving grievances constructively helps employees become more committed to the organization and to the union, improves tenure rates, and induces the belief that the organization is fair (Cappelli and Chauvin 1991; Eaton, Gordon and Keefe 1992; Leung, Chiu and Au 1993; Schappe 1996; Swidinsky 1992). Effective resolution of grievances can therefore be beneficial to all parties (Block, Beck and Olson 1996; Dibble 1997; McCabe and Lewin 1992).

Despite the importance of the grievance procedure in resolving employee-employer conflict, very little empirical research has tried to identify the factors that lead to effective resolution of grievances. Most research on grievance procedures has focused on the factors that generate grievances, primarily by examining individual employees' attitudinal and demographic characteristics (Bemmel 1994; Gordon and Miller 1984; Klaas and Thomas 1994) and the characteristics of first-line supervisors and union stewards (Briggs 1982; Dalton and Todor 1979, 1982a, 1982b). A few studies on resolution have concentrated on the effect of organizational and environmental factors on firms' grievance resolution rates (Peach and Livernash 1974; Gantz and Whitehead 1982; Olson-Buchanan 1997). Current theorizing has proposed that characteristics of the management and union, the relationship between union and management, and grievance procedures have an impact on the effectiveness of grievance handling (Knight 1986a, 1986b; Lewin 1983).

Recent studies have documented the importance of the overall relationship between union and management for grievance handling. In a field experiment, strengthening the union-management relationship helped resolve grievances more effectively (Mesch and Dalton 1992). Gainsharing plans in which employees and managers share economic benefits may also reduce grievances (Hatcher and Ross 1991; Hanlon, Meyer, and Taylor 1994). Quality of working life programs and other labour-management cooperation programs also can positively affect grievance filing and handling (Bushe 1988;

Havlovic 1991; Voos 1989). A labour-management climate that emphasizes friendliness and harmony reduces grievance rates, improves grievance settlement, and reduces the political activity of stewards (Bemmels 1994; Dastmalchian and Ng 1990; Hatcher and Ross 1991; Havlovic 1991; Meyer 1994).

Although the importance of organizational and environmental factors in grievance resolution is well established, the behaviours and perceptions of the individuals involved may also significantly affect grievance resolution. Indeed, individuals' previous behaviour is a better predictor of grievance filing than workplace demographics and characteristics (Bemmels, Reshef, and Stratton-Devine 1991).

It has frequently been suggested that the characteristics of the individuals involved in grievance procedures are critical in determining the effectiveness of grievance resolution, yet little research has been conducted (Briggs 1982; Klaas 1989). Notable exceptions are studies on the quality of first-line supervision and its effect on resolution rates (Knight 1986a, 1986b). It has also been found that formal, written procedures help resolve grievances at the first level (Davy, Stewart and Anderson 1992).

In this paper, we relate the perceptions and behaviours of union and management representatives to whether or not a grievance is resolved. Based on a conflict resolution theory that has been tested in other organizational settings, we make predictions regarding the effective resolution of filed grievances which are then tested using data collected from interviews in several Western Canadian workplaces. Our purpose is to examine the contributions of union and management representatives in resolving grievances.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Grievance negotiation is a process of two-party conflict resolution by union and management representatives. A major topic in negotiation research concerns the processes that lead to integrative agreements that reconcile both parties and produce outcomes of high joint benefit (Kressel et al. 1994; Pruitt and Carnevale 1993; Rubin, Pruitt and Kim 1994; Thompson, Mannix and Bazerman 1988; Walton and McKersie 1965). An integrative solution in grievance resolution is a voluntary settlement which is equitable to both parties. Grievance procedure effectiveness can be measured by the degree to which high-quality, creative solutions are reached in a timely manner (Lewin 1983; Peterson and Lewin 1982).

Research suggests that integrative solutions are more likely in conflicts where the parties believe that their goals are positively interdependent.

Deutsch (1973, 1994) theorized that people who believe their goals are positively related (in that they can both be successful) are able to manage conflict more effectively than those with competitive goals where the goal attainment of one interferes with the goal attainment of the other party. Tjosvold (1989, 1990) and his associates have found in heterogeneous organizational settings that employees with cooperative goals coordinate their efforts, work productively, and create integrative solutions to their differences. Competitive goals and independent goals (where the success of one neither helps nor frustrates others) have been found to frustrate coordination and task accomplishment (Johnson et al. 1981).

Bargaining research has shown that negotiators are more likely to reach integrative agreements when they perceive cooperative rather than competitive motives (Bazerman, Magliozzi and Neale 1985; Deutsch 1973). Peterson and Tracy (1976) found that, when motivational orientations and action tendencies of the two parties are cooperative, they are more likely to report successful problem-solving in day-to-day labour-management relations.

Reciprocating integrative offers and other behaviours during the discussion facilitates effective resolution of conflict (Pruitt and Carnevale 1993). Negotiators tend to reciprocate each other's behaviour so that the integrative behaviour of one results in integrative behaviour of the other (Komorita and Esser 1975; Weingart, Bennett and Brett 1993). Labour-management studies indicate that conflicts such as grievances can be resolved effectively by encouraging voluntary, integrative negotiations between parties (Brett and Goldberg 1983; Knight 1986b).

Deutsch (1973) argued that cooperative, compared to competitive, interaction patterns induced more integrative agreements in conflict. Direct, open-minded consideration of opposing views, working for mutual benefit, seeking to understand others, and combining the best ideas are cooperative interaction patterns which facilitate productive conflict resolution (Tjosvold 1985). These studies suggest that cooperative goals promote open-minded discussion that in turn results in high-quality, integrative solutions.

Based on the above reasoning, the following hypotheses are proposed:

1. The greater the cooperative goals perceived by the parties involved in grievance negotiation, the more likely they will be to discuss their diverse views open-mindedly and constructively. Competitive and independent goals, on the other hand, result in close-minded interaction.
2. The more open-minded the discussion of opposing views, the more likely the grievance will be resolved efficiently with a creative, high-quality solution.

Positive goal interdependence itself is not sufficient to induce effective grievance handling. The parties themselves would have to interact

open-mindedly to increase the likelihood of integrative solutions. We have used structural equation analysis to test the assumption that the open-minded discussion of opposing differences mediates the impact of goal interdependence on outcomes. We also assess the direct effects of goal interdependence.

METHOD

Participants and Organizations

Management in two large Western Canadian forest product companies and their district and plant union leaders agreed to participate in a study of grievance handling. With their support, thirty-one people from two sites of one company and 24 people from four sites of the second company were recruited as interview subjects. Four plant managers, 14 second-level foremen, five foreman-supervisors, and seven employee relations managers representing management and seven plant chairman, four vice chairman, 12 shop stewards, and two secretaries representing the union participated in the study. The respondents provided 32 grievances that were resolved at the committee level and 22 cases that were not resolved and were referred to the next higher level. These 54 incidents were used in the analysis.

Interviewees were assured of confidentiality by the research team. The research results were provided to the companies and unions, but only the general findings and those incidents for which the source could not be identified were disclosed.

Interviews

The critical incident method was used to develop the interview schedule (Flanagan 1954). Respondents were asked to describe in detail a recent, significant grievance. Interviewees first described the setting, what happened, their goal and those of the other party, and the consequences. They then answered specific questions allowing us to code the incident.¹

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1. Four undergraduates were trained to be interviewers. In 15 hours of training, they practiced interviewing and received feedback so that they would interview in a standard, nonsuggestive manner. They were trained to have the person describe the interaction, to code the incident through the respondent's answers to specific questions, and to record the interviewee's responses accurately. Careful training and supervision of interviewers, explicit guidelines for conducting the interview, and the specific Likert-type questions were all designed to improve the validity of the data collected (Fowler 1993). The interviewers were not told the hypotheses. They pledged to protect the confidentiality of the respondents.

Measures of Goal Interdependence

Respondents were asked to rate the extent to which their goals were related to each other positively (cooperative), negatively (competition), or unrelated (independence) on three 7-point Likert-type scales. (The full interview schedule is available from the authors.) These ratings were used in the correlational and structural equation analyses.

Respondents described the reasons why they rated the incident in this way. These antecedents for goal interdependence were later categorized. The incidents were sorted for this analysis according to which goal interdependence received the highest rating. For example, if the respondent gave the highest rating to the question asking the extent goals were positively related to each other compared to ratings on negatively and unrelated goals, the incident was coded as cooperative. The five incidents in which two goal interdependencies had the same rating were not used in this analysis. The interviewees then indicated on a 7-point Likert-type scale the extent to which they had been confident that they could work successfully with the others involved in handling the grievance.

Measures of Interaction

Interviewees responded to a series of questions using 7-point scales to code the interaction during the incident. These questions were based on previous findings on conflict in cooperative and competitive goal interdependence (Deutsch 1973; Tjosvold 1985). Interviewees indicated the extent to which they felt free to express their views; understood what each other was trying to accomplish; put together the best of the various ideas; they worked together for mutual benefit; felt accepted, and tried to consider the other views open-mindedly. For each item, they first rated themselves and then rated the other's behaviour. The self-interact scale had a reliability Cronbach alpha of .73 and the other-interact had an alpha of .81.

Measures of Consequences

The respondents indicated their feelings at the end of the interaction and rated them from negative to positive on a 7-point scale. They were then asked to identify their responses to the interaction after they had a chance to evaluate it. They specified the effects of the incident on themselves. Then they indicated on 7-point scales the extent to which they handled the grievance efficiently, the extent to which the solution (proposed or actual) was creative, and the extent to which the solution was high-quality.

They next indicated whether the grievance was settled at their level or at the next level and described the reasons for this decision. They also

outlined the major lessons they had learned and rated whether these lessons would have a major or minor impact on their future grievance handling (they could also indicate that they were undecided regarding this impact). Finally, they identified the training that would help them manage grievances constructively.

Coding Descriptions

In addition to the responses to specific, Likert-type questions, the interviews yielded descriptive information. Two groups each with two raters classified these descriptions into categories. The respondents indicated the reasons why they had indicated that the goals were linked positively, negatively, or independently. The two groups of coders were able to agree in 92% of the cases. They resolved their differences and these were used in the analysis. The coders agreed in 95% of the cases on the consequences the grievance handling had on the respondents and their resolved ratings were used.

Analytic Approach

To more vigorously test cooperation theory, structural equation analysis with the *EQS for Macintosh* program was used to examine the underlying causal structure between goal interdependence, dynamics, and outcomes (Bentler and Wu 1995). This analysis involved only the structural model, not the measurement model. Overall measures of relationship and task productivity were constructed for these analyses. Feelings, efficient resolution, quality solution, and creative solution formed the outcome measure (Cronbach alpha = .89.) which along with goal interdependence and the self and other interact scales were used in the analysis.

The theory of cooperation and competition suggests that open-minded interaction mediates the relationship between goals (i.e., cooperative, competitive, and independent goals) and the outcome of an effective resolution of the grievance. The Mediating Effects model suggested by the theory implies that there should be no direct effects between goals and outcomes, that is, open-minded dynamics mediates the relationship between goal interdependence and outcomes.

A nested model test commonly adopted in causal model analysis was used whereby the Mediating Effects model was compared to the Direct Effects model. The Direct Effects model posited that goal interdependence affects outcomes directly without interaction.

RESULTS

Goal Interdependence, Interaction, and Consequences

The analysis of data (see Table 1) from both the managers and employees support the first hypothesis that the more the positive goal interdependence, the more open-mindedly the parties discussed their various views. In cooperative goal incidents, employees and managers were confident that they could interact effectively ($r = .39, p < .01$) and discussed grievance issues openly and constructively (self-interact, $r = .50, p < .01$; other interact, $r = .64, p < .01$). In addition, cooperative goals were correlated with positive affect, efficient resolution, and a creative, high-quality solution.

In contrast, competitive goals diminished expectations of an effective interaction ($r = -.27, p < .05$) and in the open-minded interaction by the self, ($r = -.27, p < .01$) and by the other, ($r = -.55, p < .01$). Competitive goals were also negatively related to feelings, efficiency and quality. Independent goals were not statistically related to open-minded discussion; they were negatively related to creative solution.

Results also support the hypotheses that the open-minded discussion of opposing views promotes the efficient, high-quality, and creative resolution of grievances. Self-interact and other-interact predicted positive feelings ($r = .47, p < .01$; $r = .50, p < .01$), efficient resolution ($r = .47, p < .01$; $r = .56, p < .01$), and quality solution, ($r = .33, p < .05$; $r = .31, p < .05$) and a creative solution ($r = .27, p < .05$; $r = .29, p < .05$). The structural equation analysis supported the Mediating Effects Model, indicating that cooperative goals leads to open-minded interaction which in turn leads to outcomes.²

Antecedents of Goal Interdependence

Results suggest the conditions that affect interviewees' conclusions about goal interdependence. After the respondents indicated the goal interdependence, they were asked to describe the reasoning that led them to make these conclusions. The coded reasons are summarized in Table 2. A χ^2 statistical

2. The Mediating Effects and the Direct Effects models were compared through structural equation analysis. The χ^2 of the Mediating Effects model was 2.61 (d.f. = 9, $p = .46$). The χ^2 of the Direct Effects model was 101.63 (d.f. = 3, $p < .01$). The difference between the Mediating Effects model and the Direct Effects model was significant (χ^2 difference = 99.02, d.f. = 6, $p < .01$), indicating that omission of the mediating effects of constructive controversy significantly deteriorated the model. Results of the causal model comparison suggest that the Mediating Effects model be accepted. The path coefficients of the theorized mediating effects model help to explore the findings more specifically and suggest that the other's lack of open-minded discussion was quite disruptive of an effective resolution of the grievance ($\beta = .39, p < .01$).

TABLE 1
Correlations among Variables

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Cooperation	2.86	2.47									
2. Competition	4.44	2.60	-.77**								
3. Independ	1.76	1.67	-.24*	-.41**							
4. Expectation	4.47	2.24	.39**	-.27*	-.15						
5. Self-Interact	5.06	1.28	.50**	-.42**	-.08	.45**					
6. Other-Interact	4.49	1.50	.64**	-.55**	-.08	.55**	.82**				
7. Feeling	4.81	1.95	.40**	-.39**	.01	.64**	.47**	.50**			
8. Efficiency	4.81	1.83	.36**	-.30*	-.03	.37**	.47**	.56**	.45*		
9. Quality	4.49	2.09	.37**	-.22*	-.19	.46**	.33*	.31*	.64*	.26*	
10. Creativity	3.15	2.16	.21*	-.04	-.22*	.12	.27*	.29*	.22*	.09	.49**

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

analysis was not completed because of the number of null categories. The most frequent reasons given for cooperative goals were a shared understanding of the problem and its resolution, and union and management acceptance of each other's goals. The most frequent reasons for competition were opposing interests and aspirations, and being intransigent to promote a political agenda.

TABLE 2
Antecedents to Goal Interdependence

<i>Reason</i>	<i>Cooperative</i>	<i>Competitive</i>	<i>Independ</i>
Shared View of the Problem	10	0	0
Common Objectives	5	0	0
Desire for Mutual Benefit	2	0	0
Opposing Interests	0	10	0
Politics	0	5	0
Hidden Agenda	0	4	0
Uninformed	0	2	0
Fear of Precedent	0	1	0
Union Duty to Defend	0	1	0
Independent Task	0	0	3
Employee Malice	0	0	2

Note: Respondents could give more than one response per incident.

Grievance Issues

The type of grievance issue for each incident (classified as seniority, discipline or other) was crossed with goal interdependence (Table 3). Because of the small number of cases, independence was dropped. The resulting 3 by 2 analysis indicated that the distribution of issues was statistically different in the two goal interdependencies, $\chi^2(2) = 6.54$, $p < .05$. Although seniority issues occurred in both cooperative and competitive situations, they were more frequent in cooperative. Discipline issues were more often handled within a competitive context.

TABLE 3
Grievance Type and Goal Interdependence

<i>Grievance Type</i>	<i>Cooperative</i>	<i>Competitive</i>
Seniority	10	5
Discipline	4	11
Other	3	7

Resolution at Initial Level

Results on resolution of the grievance at the initial level support the value of cooperative goals. Thirteen incidents characterized by cooperative goals and 5 by competitive goals were resolved at the initial stage. However, only 4 issues characterized by cooperative goals (compared to 18 with competitive goals and 5 with independent goals) were moved to the next higher level for possible resolution. This difference is significant, $\chi^2(2) = 17.94$, $p < .01$.

Respondents also indicated why the grievance was resolved at the first stage or was sent to the higher level. Reasons for the resolution were that an agreement satisfactory to both union and management were reached (9), a substantial compromise was made by one party (7), and that how the issue needed to be resolved was clear to all of those involved (3). Reasons for moving the grievance to the next level included that one side was adamant and unwilling to compromise (10), a "personality conflict" where people were hostile toward each other (8), the realization that the settlement might set a precedent (8), and management disinterest (3).

Consequences

Respondents described the effects the interaction had on people and on the organization before they answered the Likert-type questions. Categories of effects were collapsed into positive, negative, and no impact to reduce the number of null categories for the statistical analysis. The analysis indicated that the distribution of consequences were statistically different in the three goal interdependencies for the effects on individuals, $\chi^2(4) = 13.17$, $p < .01$, and for organizations, $\chi^2(4) = 15.36$, $p < .01$. The more detailed analysis of the effects are included to give a more specific understanding (Tables 4 and 5). In particular, respondents indicated that with cooperative goals they had positive feelings. Competitive goals were associated with frustration and anger at management. For effects on the organization, cooperative goals were associated with satisfaction for both union and management and improved procedures. Competition was associated with financial cost for management, strengthening the union at management's expense, and strengthening management at the union's expense.

Lessons for Future Grievance Handling

At the end of the interview, respondents indicated what they had learned that might help them deal with future grievances and whether this knowledge would make a small difference or a large difference (they could also

TABLE 4
Consequences on Individuals

<i>Consequence</i>	<i>Cooperative</i>	<i>Competitive</i>	<i>Independ</i>
Positive Feelings	11	2	2
Learned to Cope	1	1	0
Management Misunderstand	1	1	0
Frustration	4	8	1
Angry at Management	0	5	0
More Paperwork	0	1	0
More Wary	0	1	2
No Effect	1	4	1

Note: Respondents could give more than one response per incident.

TABLE 5
Consequences on Organization

<i>Consequence</i>	<i>Cooperative</i>	<i>Competitive</i>	<i>Independ</i>
Mutual Satisfaction	4	2	0
Improved Procedure	2	0	1
More Cautious	2	1	0
Set Precedent	4	6	1
Increased Morale	1	2	0
Cost Money	0	3	0
Negative Effect	0	3	0
Strengthened Union	0	2	0
Strengthen Management	0	2	1
Union Looked Bad	0	1	0
No Impact	4	3	2

Note: Respondents could give more than one response per incident.

indicate that they were undecided) (see Table 6). Practice and experience, the desire to improve listening and research were lessons that were expected to make a large difference. Cut and dry, straightforward cases did not result in lessons that respondents thought would make much difference in their future grievance handling. Respondents also provided suggestions to increase the resolution at the committee level. The most frequently cited need was for improved communication, followed by a win-win orientation, improved procedures, more time to prepare, and more training in conflict resolution.

TABLE 6
Lessons for Future Grievance Handling

<i>Reason</i>	<i>Little Difference</i>	<i>Undecided</i>	<i>Much Difference</i>
Practice	1	1	11
Improve Listening	0	0	4
Improve Research	0	2	3
Management Reflect	0	0	1
Well-Handled	2	0	1
Entrenched Attitude	2	0	1
Unsure of Rules	0	1	0
Unresolved Grievance	0	1	0
Lack of Information	0	2	0
Straightforward	7	2	0
Need More Time	1	0	0
Someone Else Benefit	1	0	0

Note: Respondents could give more than one response per incident.

DISCUSSION

The perceptions and behaviours of individuals, our results suggest, affect grievance handling. Management and union representatives with cooperative goals expressed their opposing views openly, listened open-mindedly, conveyed an intent to work for mutual benefit, and combined their ideas. When they had positively linked goals and interacted open-mindedly, they developed creative, high-quality solutions and used their resources efficiently. However, in the context of competitive goals, they interacted close-mindedly and were unable to agree upon integrative solutions efficiently.

The qualitative data results support the overall theoretical framework. Cooperative goal grievances were resolved with positive feelings, satisfaction for both union and management, and improved procedures. Competitive goal grievances left feelings of frustration and anger at management, cost the management money, and resulted in either a victory for management or union but at the other's expense.

Reasons why the grievances were resolved at the initial level illustrate the value of integrative solutions. Mutually satisfactory agreements, substantial compromise by one party, and a mutual recognition of the best option all facilitated an effective resolution at the committee stage. However, the intransigence of one side, hostile personal attitudes, and concerns about setting a precedent impeded integrating positions and mutually beneficial solutions.

Major reasons that led employees and managers to perceive that their goals were largely positively related were having a shared understanding of the problem and its resolution, the acceptance of each other's goals, and a win-win, mutual benefit orientation. Opposing interests and aspirations, politics that lead people to be intransigent, and being uninformed were antecedents for negatively linked goals.

Type of grievance issue affects resolution. Grievances over working conditions may be more easily resolved and granted than those concerning work assignments (Ng and Dastmalchian 1989). Policy grievances may provoke different dynamics than disciplinary ones (Klaas, Heneman and Olson 1991). In terms of the theory developed here, some issues may place the grievance within a competitive context, making integrative solutions more difficult to find. Seniority was found to be handled more often within a cooperative than competitive context, and discipline was more often associated with competition than with cooperation. It may be speculated that the type of grievance had some impact on goal interdependence.

Respondents indicated that practice and experience dealing with their differences, improved listening, and more thorough research would help them to resolve grievances. Their high priority training issues were improving communication, developing a win-win context for grievance handling, being more prepared, and refining conflict management skills. Interesting, simple grievances did not test their abilities and, as a result, employees and managers did not feel they had learned much that would help them deal with future grievances.

The theory and findings presented in this study suggest the need to define conflict independently of opposing interests. Research on negotiation as well as labour-management relations has traditionally assumed that conflict arises from opposing interests (Kochan and Verma 1983; Schmidt and Kochan 1972). Opposing interests are the bases for many important conflicts. However, management and union representatives in this study believed that their goals and interests were positively related in some grievances. Equating conflict with opposing interests is particularly questionable given that competitive goals substantially affects conflict management. Conflict can be defined as incompatible activities in which one person's behaviour interferes with or obstructs another, but this may or may not involve opposing interests (Deutsch 1973).

Limitations

The results of this study are, of course, limited by the sample and operations. The data are self-reported and subject to biases, and may not accurately describe the situations (although recent research suggests that

self-reported data are not as limited as commonly expected) (Crampton and Wagner 1994; Spector 1992). However, post hoc rationalization is a threat to the validity of the study in that respondents could have assumed that they must have had cooperative goals if outcomes were constructive. These data are also correlational and do not justify drawing causal links between goal interdependence, interaction, and effectiveness. However, respondents reported on specific events which should be less distorted and less subject to the problems of common method variance than questions that ask for generalizations (Podsakoff and Organ 1986). Recent evidence also indicates that people often accurately perceive their social environment (Balzer and Sulsky 1992; Murphy, Jako and Anhalt 1992). The data were collected through one method and correlations could be inflated because of common method variance. However, some evidence indicates that common method variance may not be as much of an artifact as commonly assumed (Avolio, Yammarino and Bass 1991; Spector 1987).

Spector and Brannick (1995) have argued that the most effective way to overcome recall, common method variance, and other methodological weaknesses is to test ideas with different methods. Previous experiments with behavioural measures provide results with high internal validity for the major findings of this interview study (Johnson et al. 1981). It would be desirable to provide direct experimental verification of the theory in organizational settings.

Practical Implications

Surveys suggest that many North American employees are unconvinced that top managers are committed to developing strong cooperative links where people feel highly valued and believe they have an open channel to resolve their grievances (Moskal 1991). With reason, many employees are afraid that filing a grievance will be held against them (Klaas and DeNisi 1989; Olson-Buchanan 1996).

The results presented here, if replicated, have potentially important practical implications. They identify grievance handling conditions and skills that lead to effective resolution. Although organizational and environmental conditions are important, representatives may, within these constraints, be able to develop a strong sense of positive interdependence and the skills to interact open-mindedly. These goals and skills should in turn help them to develop integrative solutions that both management and union accept (Tjosvold and Tjosvold 1995).

Cooperative goals underlie the motives to seek mutual benefit and integrative solutions. Accepting each other's interests and goals as legitimate, shared goals, and common understanding of issues can help union and

management representatives perceive positively linked goals. Political posturing and viewing issues as opposing and "win-lose," on the other hand, very much interfere.

Improved communication and conflict resolution skills were identified in this and previous studies as important training goals (Fisher and Reshef 1992). The results of this study provide a specific framework for skill development that can guide training and feedback (Knight 1986a, 1986b). Open-minded interaction skills, namely, expressing one's views openly, putting oneself in the other's shoes, considering the other's views open-mindedly, working for mutual benefit, and showing acceptance of the other as a person while disagreeing with his or her position, were found to be highly related, to be fostered by cooperative goals, and to contribute substantially to successful grievance handling.

Effective grievance handling benefits individual employees and their commitment to the company and union and contributes to a just, productive workplace (Cappelli and Chauvin 1991; Gordon and Bowlby 1989). If mistreated, however, people feel justified in exacerbating the conflict (Kennedy 1993; Leung, Chiu and Au 1993). The overall union-management relationship and many other factors have an impact on the initiation and resolution of grievances (Chaykowski, Slotsve and Butler 1992; Fisher and Reshef 1992; Havlovic 1991; Labig and Greer 1988). Yet our results suggest that the attitudes and skills of individuals can aid grievance resolution. This study contributes to effective grievance handling by showing how a social-psychological theory can help to analyze grievance handling (Bemmels and Foley 1996). Its framework calls for strengthening cooperative goals and the training of open-minded interaction skills. Studies are needed to test how generalizable these findings are to the wide range of settings where people seek to resolve grievances.

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RÉSUMÉ

La résolution des griefs : interdépendance et interaction

La résolution de conflits survenant lors de l'administration de la convention collective influence sérieusement les relations entre patrons et syndicats d'une part et la performance économique de l'entreprise d'autre part. L'importance des facteurs organisationnels et environnementaux dans la résolution des griefs est bien établie. Cette étude identifie les comportements et les perceptions de ces individus impliqués et qui influencent la résolution des griefs.

La négociation des griefs est un processus de résolution bipartite de conflit par les représentants syndicaux et patronaux. Les études démontrent que l'occurrence de solutions complètes et efficaces est plus probable lorsque les parties croient que leurs objectifs sont positivement interdépendants. Selon Morton Deutsch, ceux qui croient que leurs objectifs sont positivement interreliés sont capables d'administrer plus efficacement le conflit que ceux qui ont des objectifs concurrents. De plus, des offres complètes, réciproques, et autres tels comportements lors des discussions facilitent la solution efficace des conflits. Nous suggérons ici que des objectifs coopératifs favorisent l'étude directe et plus ouverte de points de vue divergents, la promotion de l'intérêt mutuel, la compréhension des autres et la recherche des meilleures idées dans la résolution productive des griefs.

Les gestionnaires de deux grandes entreprises de produits de la forêt dans l'Ouest canadien et leurs représentants syndicaux aux niveaux local et

de district ont accepté de participer à une étude portant sur l'administration des griefs. Avec leur appui, 31 personnes provenant de deux sites différents pour une entreprise et 24 provenant de quatre sites différents pour la seconde se sont portées volontaires pour accorder une entrevue. Quatre directeurs d'usine, 14 contremaîtres de second niveau, 5 surintendants, 7 gestionnaires de relations du travail, 7 présidents d'usine, 4 vice-présidents, 12 délégués syndicaux et deux secrétaires représentant le syndicat ont participé à ce travail. Les répondants eux-mêmes ont fourni 32 griefs qui étaient au stage du comité et 25 cas non résolus et référés au niveau supérieur. Tous ces cas ont été utilisés pour la présente étude.

Nous avons utilisé la méthode de l'incident critique pour établir le programme des entrevues. Nous avons demandé aux répondants de décrire en détail un grief récent significatif. Les répondants décrivaient alors le contexte, les événements, leurs propres objectifs, ceux de l'autre partie et les conséquences. Ils répondaient ensuite à des questions spécifiques permettant la codification.

L'analyse des données démontre que les représentants patronaux et syndicaux partageant des objectifs coopératifs exprimaient leurs divergences de façon ouverte, écoutaient l'autre, faisaient preuve d'une intention de travailler pour le bénéfice mutuel et combinaient leurs idées. En ayant des objectifs positivement interreliés et en interagissant avec un esprit ouvert, ils ont indiqué des solutions créatives de qualité et utilisé leurs ressources efficacement. Cependant, ceux dotés d'objectifs compétitifs ont interagi de façon fermée et furent incapables de s'entendre efficacement sur des solutions complètes. Les résultats des données qualitatives confirment aussi notre cadre théorique général.

Les principales raisons qu'ont amené employés et gestionnaires à percevoir que leurs objectifs étaient interreliés positivement sont : une compréhension partagée du problème et de sa solution, une acceptation des objectifs de l'autre et une orientation gagnant-gagnant avec bénéfice mutuel. Des intérêts et des aspirations divergents, l'intransigeance et la non-information menaient directement à des objectifs compétitifs.

Nos résultats, bien qu'ils soient limités par l'échantillon et la méthodologie utilisée, ont des implications pratiques potentiellement importantes s'ils sont confirmés. Les représentants peuvent, à l'intérieur des contraintes organisationnelles et environnementales, être en mesure de développer un sens profond de relations positives permettant de résoudre leurs griefs et d'aider les employés à mieux s'intégrer à l'entreprise et au syndicat et à croire que leur lieu de travail est juste et productif. Notre étude contribue à la gestion efficace des griefs en démontrant l'utilité d'une théorie psychosociale d'interdépendance d'objectifs dans l'analyse de la gestion des griefs.